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ABSTRACT

In this exploratory research study an ethnographic and survey approach was used to examine help seeking behavior in a Latino community. The emphasis of the study was on the identification of those existing functional social networks which are most accessible, preferred, and used by this group during times of emotional or social stress. Information is presented which describes the extent, structure, and use of informal and formal helping systems. Ethnicity and cultural association and preference effects are explored. Help seeking is examined in terms of three questions: (1) Is ethnicity related more strongly to some aspects of help seeking than others? (2) Do demographic variables affect the relationship between ethnicity and help seeking behavior? and (3) Do social contextual variables influence the relationship between ethnicity and help seeking behavior? Ethnicity is measured using an Index of Ethnic Identification. Informal helping systems provided twice as much help as did formal systems. Overall, it was found that relatives, friends, and spouses were preferred informal helpers, while doctors, and priests were preferred formal helpers.
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Mental Health Resources for the Spanish Speaking: Latino Helping Networks

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The use of community assessment techniques as an integral part of any human service delivery system has gained increasing legitimacy in the past few years. In theory, the current literature reflects a need for expansion of community assessment concepts towards a more "holistic" view of the population. In fact, however, most current efforts of community assessment in the mental health field appear to be concerned with identifying needs in the abstract, and gaps in service (Nguyen et al, 1976). The limited perspective of needs identification without context, raises the possibility of not accounting for factors related to the cultural and social ethos in the assessment of a community's character.

The concept of community assessment used in this study is drawn from current theory in needs assessment (Attkinson and Nguyen 1976), neighborhoods and helping network analysis (Warren, 1975) and community support support and social systems (Caplan, 1974). It is this author's contention is that community assessment research provides a key missing link to human service caregivers. This missing link is in the form of information which specifically records and assesses an individuals actual use and preference for certain informal or formal helping systems during times of needs. In community assessment these helping systems can be studied using the concepts of neighborhoods, social support and utilization of informal and formal helping networks.

This research study was exploratory in nature. Through a combination of ethnographic and a survey approach, this study has applied the perspective of socio-cultural community assessment, in the examination of one specific function in a Latino¹ community, that of help-seeking behavior. This proposal will use the concept of helping networks² (Warren and Clifford, 1976) as the basic unit of analysis. The emphasis of the study is on the identification

of existing functional networks or systems of social relation which are most accessible, preferred, and utilized by this group during times of emotional or social stress or need. Information is presented which describes the extent, structure and use of informal (e.g. extended family, neighbors, friends) and formal (e.g. social services, mental health agencies) helping systems. Information is also presented which describes the extent to which ethnicity and cultural association and preference effects the utilization of formal or informal helping networks.

Recent studies have led researchers to believe that because the SSS population is only partially acculturated and marginally integrated economically, it is, as a consequence subject to a number of stressors (Padilla, Ruiz, and Alvarez, 1975). Despite the possibility of experiencing more stress, however, it has been concluded that mental health facilities are underutilized by the SSS people (Padilla et al, 1973). The alternative explanations for this inconsistency have focused on either (1) the existence of discouraging mental health policies, or (2) the utilization of folk medicine (e.g., curanderos, healers).

From a more recent study of Mexican-American service utilization patterns (Padilla et al, 1976), a third explanation has been suggested. The authors concluded that, "the most significant reason for lack of use of mental health clinics is the preference for alternative resources when dealing with emotional problems" (p. 19). The most common resources used included the reliance upon relatives, compadres (god-parents), friends, physicians, and priests. Thus, the existence, preference, and use of informal and/or formal social support systems during times of stress should be considered in the development and utilization of mental health services orientated to this particular group.

The major theme of this study examines how ethnic identification with Latino cultural norms effects the relationship of help-seeking behavior for this group under study.

Help seeking behavior in the present study was examined within three basic questions:

1. Is ethnicity related more strongly to some aspects of help-seeking than others? (e.g. ethnic identification as it influences the type of community helpers sought)
2. Do demographic variables affect the relationship between ethnicity and help-seeking behavior?
3. Do social contextual variable influence the relationship between ethnicity and help-seeking behavior? (e.g. availability of family as it may influence preference for informal helpers)

Research Methodology

The Setting. The Latino Outreach and Community Services Center geographically located in the Southwest section of metropolitan Detroit. It has been estimated that the majority of Detroit's 90,000 Latino population resides in this predominantly low-income area.

The area selected for study was southwest Detroit because it was easily accessible to the Agency, it is the area containing the highest percentage of Latinos, approximately 16% of the total population and it is the area most often identified as the center of activity for this local Latino community.

The research project was conducted in four stages. These four stages were; 1) Planning and Development, 2) Ethnography, 3) Survey and Sampling and 4) Analysis and Utilization.

Stage One: Planning and Development. In keeping with the Agency's grass roots service approach two major themes prevailed in the project's development. First, an effort was made therefore, to include and inform the community of our purposes and methods for collecting information. Second, the use of community members as an integral part of this study was the second major concern in the projects development. Three outreach workers were selected and trained to work as members of an agency research

team. The specific criteria for selection required that they be from the community and a bilingual/bicultural Latino.

After a review of the literature, Warren and Clifford's (1974) helping networks approach was adopted for this study. This approach is designed to assess the types of functional supportive and helping systems which are provided for by a community's residents. An interview combining an ethnographic and survey approach was designed to gather information related to the types of support systems, and resources which are actually used by the respondent in situations of need.

Stage Two: Ethnography. The ethnographic approach often referred to as participant observation" or qualitative observation has been used as a form of sociological inquiry (Suttles, 1962). As a tool for community assessment ethnography implies the need for understanding of a particular population or group within their existing socio-contextual framework.

The two methods used in the ethnographic phase were participant observation and the use of open-ended informal interviews. Specific persons believed to have some knowledge of the community's historical, social or political sense (e.g. local Latino leaders, school officials, Latino merchants, service providers) were selected and informally interviewed. Informal interviews were also conducted with people who might not otherwise be contacted. Women visiting in front of their homes, people on the street near stores, restaurants and bars, and anyone who was willing to stop and chat was interviewed.

Boundary selection and definition was a critical element in the methodology of this project. To account for the uneven distribution of the Latino target group, a multistage area sample method was used. Step One involved the purposive selection of areas where a major concentration of Latino persons resided.

The three procedures specifically used in arriving at the neighborhood boundaries were;

1. The selection of the Southwest Detroit Metropolitan area as having the highest concentration of Latinos for the city (90,000).
2. The selection of seven census tracts which represent the highest level of concentration of Latinos in the Southwest area.
3. The use of three elementary school boundaries as a means of distinguishing the three neighborhoods under study.

Step two of the sampling methodology used, was the selection of specific sampling blocks and housing units. The specific target focus of the sampling was on Latino household units only.

Stage Three: Survey and Sampling. The development and completion of the interview survey schedule took approximately two months. During this time period the interview was drafted, edited and translated into Spanish. Interviewer training also occurred during this project stage. Conceptually, the survey focuses on three areas of questions; 1) Parameters of Helping 2) Community Integration and Social Support, and 3) Individual and Contextual Variables and their Effects on selected Helping Indicators.

There were 2 female and 3 male interviewers, three of whom were of Mexican descent and two who were Puerto Rican. All five interviewers are bilingual/bicultural.

The procedures which the interviewers followed were first, to contact those households identified as part of the selected sample. The interviewer would then inform the household member of the agency's purposes for conducting the survey, the method of selection and the value of the respondents contribution as a community resident. Screening for eligibility and conducting the interview were the final steps in our procedures.

Stage Four: Utilization. The end of the survey will not be the end of the use of this data. The agency intends to integrate the information

obtained into its planning process for the benefit of the Latino community.

Results

The survey results examine the thesis that help-seeking in the Latino community is affected by ethnicity. The emphasis of the results is placed on the analysis of the pathways or "networks" utilized by the respondent during times of need and the exploration of the existence, structure and use of informal and formal helping networks in a Latino community is critically examined. Variations in types of help seeking behavior are examined as they are influenced by ethnic and cultural identification.

Description of the Sample. The total population sampled was 1,623 households. The final number of interviews completed was 104.

An equal proportion of heads of households and their spouses were interviewed. Other people interviewed as members of the household were children, grandparents, and other related family members. A majority of those persons interviewed were females. The male respondents were identified as the head of household in most cases. Persons that were married with children constituted half of our group. A fairly large proportion (22%) of unmarried (single, separated, widowed or divorced) people also had children.

These data reflect the Latino community in economic and social reality of urban living. The low occupation and employment status of our sample for example, reflects the fact that the sample lives in proximity to a large industrial area. These industries in the local area provide employment to the majority of Latino blue collar workers. Ironically, these same industries contribute to the high rate of unemployment particularly during periods of an economic slump. Even though half of the Mexican respondents reported being born in the United States, they preferred to identify themselves as Mexican and not Mexican American.

The majority of our group was fluent in Spanish and almost one-fourth of the respondents reported fluency in Spanish only. The large percentage

of Spanish usage in this population clearly demonstrates the need and importance of bilingual services designed to meet the needs of this group. Considering the fact that eighty percent of the sample reported living in the Detroit area for more than 10 years, the continued use of Spanish must be regarded as a demonstratable way of maintaining cultural ties.

The low rate of educational achievement (56% 8th grade or less) is not surprising considering the average drop "push" out rate for Latinos nationwide is 75%. As with the national level, there is a direct relationship between age and education. The younger group of Latino respondents received more education than the older group.

In summary, this Latino group is primarily of a lower socioeconomic status. The influences of an urban industrialized area and the possibility for advancement have attracted many Latinos to this community. The possibility and promise of upward economic mobility however, has not yet apparently been achieved as evidenced through the employment data we have obtained.

Ethnicity and Help Seeking Behavior. Ethnicity is measured using an Index of Ethnic Identification. This index is intended to locate individuals in a continuum ranging from High to Low in Latino cultural identification. The purpose of the index is not to determine who is more or less "ethnic" but rather will serve as a guide for determining whether those respondents within the sample identify more or less with traditional cultural norms. The three dimensions used in the index were; 1) language familiarity and usage; 2) ethnic self-identification, and, 3) ethnic group interaction.

The median of the Ethnic Index scores (28) served as the division between two groups. The two ethnic groups identified through the Index were labeled as Monocultural Spanish group, and the Bicultural group.

Help Seeking Behavior, was measured across three dimensions. These dimensions are; 1) Formal Agency - attitudes towards service,

- 2) Helping Path - used for specific problems, and 3) Helper Perception of Informal/Formal services: use and effectiveness.

Table 1 indicates the respondents subjective impressions of the help seeking process during recent agency utilization. The survey assessed the respondents feelings of trust, helpfulness, and general perceptions of concern; understanding; competence and respect. These results suggest that the Bicultural group is the least satisfied and more skeptical of the quality of services they received. Consumer attitudes toward formal helping agencies are clearly affected by the respondent's ethnic identification.

Helping Pathways. A total of 87% of the total sample reported having at least one of five concerns recently or in the last month or so. Typical concerns involved job seeking, feeling depressed, suspicion of people in the neighborhood.

There is a significant relationship between ethnicity and the use of informal helpers ($p < .001$). Table 2 presents this relationship. Those more likely to use informal helpers are the bicultural group. The bicultural are the higher utilizers of formal helpers as well, although not significantly more than the monocultural group. The bicultural group in particular, uses informal helpers such as a relative, friend and coworker significantly more than the monocultural group. Although not shown in Table 2, our results indicate the presence of nuclear family in the area has a negative relationship to the use of formal helpers. There is also some data indicating that the family may also enhance the use of a social worker and local teacher. Both of these relationships may indicate that the informal helping system operates as a screening and referral source to more formal helpers of the community.

The role of the helping transaction as "supportive" or "active" in Table 3. Table 3 presents the mean distributions of supportive and active helping transactions for personal and nonpersonal concerns in both formal and informal systems.

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It can be seen that Bicultural respondents received more help overall than the monocultural group and especially more supportive help for non-personal concerns. Informal systems provide predominantly supportive help while formal helping systems appear to provide more active help only for Bicultural respondents. Finally, it should be noted that overall, informal helping systems provided twice as much help as did formal systems.

Perception of Helpfulness. Table 4 shows the perceived level of helpfulness for various informal and formal community helpers. Overall it can be seen that relatives, friends and spouses are preferred informal helpers while doctors and priests are preferred formal helpers.

Table 5 shows the respondents perception of helpfulness of both formal and informal helpers according for both Bicultural and monocultural groups. You can see that for formal helpers, bicultural respondents perceived both informal and formal helpers as more helpful than do monocultural respondents. When personal problems are examined, as in Table 6, Monocultural respondents find informal helpers as more helpful than they did for problems in general.

Discussion

Federal mandates such as Public Law 94-63 (1975) have encouraged growing expectation that human service agencies particularly in mental health, will have to be more responsive to local needs. The response of these agencies will come by providing or developing programs appropriate to the unmet needs of a community. Thus a basic value of community research such as this project, is that current information relevant to a community, its people, and their perceived needs offers a preferred strategy for effective planning, structuring and evaluation of programs developed to meet the needs of a particular community.

For those researchers, such as myself, concerned with the improvement of quality mental health service delivery to Spanish-speaking people, the mood is shifting. The initial desire for more services, and the cry for better services, has now changed to a desire for "relevant" services. This need for relevance within the mental health service delivery system represents the developing perspective of Raza researchers that both culture and community must be considered. As Diaz (1975) suggests,

Building upon the strengths of both culture and the community it nurtures will help foster mental health and reduce mental illness thus affording us the opportunity to address the alien values and adverse environmental factors that induce individual and social dysfunctioning and by changing them, to place greater emphasis on the prevention of mental illness and related problems (p. 34).

The type of information collected in this study could serve as a potential resource for mental health planners. First, the data could aid in the identification of the actual patterns of functional behavior of a community rather than focusing only on those dysfunctional patterns. Secondly, as those patterns become clearer, there exists the possibility of identifying potential resources or sources of aid already in use by the community. Finally, assuming the goal is to integrate a human service delivery system within a particular community, identifying the informal helping systems of a community offers the possibility of creating linkages to the more formal systems of care. For planners of human service delivery systems the limited focus of community problems and dysfunction can be expanded to include the perspective of community and its existing support systems as a potential setting for community development.

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Footnotes

- ¹The term Latino is used as the reference for groups which represent the majority of Spanish-Speaking/surnamed persons in this metropolitan area. Because of its continual use by people within the community being surveyed, the author has chosen to use this term in reference to the area and its people.
- ²The concept of networks involves the belief that, "a community is among other things comprised of related and unrelated networks of relationships, each of which can be ordered along a number of dimensions, e.g., vocational, religious, political, recreational, neighborhood, charitable, educational" (Sarason, 1976, p. 15). These relationships may or may not entail face to face contact; and may provide different functions of support for different individuals or groups.

Martinez, Thomas. Alternative Mental Health Resources for the Spanish Speaking: Latino Helping Networks. APA, 1977.

Table 1

Human Service Satisfaction Ratings for
Basic Agency Users by Ethnic Index
n=89

Ethnic Group	<u>Ratings of Agency Contact</u>					
	Trust	Under- standing	Concern	Competence	Respect	Helpful
Monocultural Spanish	57.5	58.2	58.2	56.8	58.0	56.1
Bicultural	42.5	41.8	41.8	43.2	42.0	43.9

Table 2

Percent of Sample Using Formal or Informal Helping Pathways
as a Function of Ethnic Index
n=67

	<u>Helper Type</u>	
	Informal (eg Spouse, Relative, Friend)	Formal (eg Doctor, Social Worker, Priest)
Bicultural Spanish	69.6	57.1
Monocultural Spanish	30.4	42.9

($p < .01$)

Table 3

Distribution of the Types of Helping Transactions for Personal and Nonpersonal Concerns and Formal and Informal Helping Systems

ETHNIC GROUP	CONCERNS				SYSTEMS			
	Personal (40)		Nonpersonal (26)		Informal (49)		Formal (20)	
	<u>Supportive</u>	<u>Active</u>	<u>Supportive</u>	<u>Active</u>	<u>Supportive</u>	<u>Active</u>	<u>Supportive</u>	<u>Active</u>
Bicultural Spanish	30.0	35.0	61.5	15.4	46.4	20.4	25.0	35.0
Monocultural Spanish	22.5	12.5	23.1	0	28.6	4.1	25.0	15.0

Table 4

Frequency Distribution of Perceived Level of Helpfulness
for Informal and Formal Helpers
n=103

Helpers	<u>Perception of Helpfulness</u>		
	Helpful	Little or No Help	No Contact DK/NA
<u>Informal</u>			
Relatives	68.3	22.1	9.6
Friends	65.3	10.6	24.0
Spouse	62.5	9.6	27.9
Neighbors	45.2	23.1	31.7
Coworker	18.9	11.6	59.6
<u>Formal</u>			
Doctor	63.5	10.5	26.0
Minister or Priest	53.3	5.7	50.0
Local Teacher	28.9	5.8	65.4
Social Worker	21.1	5.8	73.1
Local Police	16.4	9.6	74.0
Psychologist	13.5	3.9	82.7

Table 5

Rated Helpfulness of Formal and Informal
Helpers as a Function of Ethnic Index

<u>Ethnic Group</u>	<u>Informal Helpers</u>			<u>Formal Helpers</u>		
	<u>Helpful</u>	<u>Little or No Help</u>		<u>Helpful</u>	<u>Little or No Help</u>	
Bicultural Spanish	36.9	42.7	(N) (49)	38.8	48.2	N (42)
Monocultural Spanish	10.7	9.7	(54) 103	10.6	2.4	(43) 85

Table 6

Perception of Helper Effectiveness for Those
with Personal Problems as a Function of Ethnic Index

<u>Ethnic Group</u>	<u>Informal Helpers (67)</u>		<u>Formal Helpers (56)</u>	
	<u>Helpful</u>	<u>Little or No Help</u>	<u>Helpful</u>	<u>Little or No Help</u>
Bicultural Spanish	43.3	11.9	42.9	12.5
Monocultural Spanish	32.8	11.9	42.9	1.8